

RE: Testimony on Raised Bill 1105

Dear Education Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to present to the Committee. I would like to express my extreme opposition to Raised Bill 1105. My opposition to this bill is based upon current scientific evidence, the complexity of translating that evidence into practice, and common sense.

I would like the education committee to take into consideration the findings of the National Institute of Health (1990). In that report the NIH study group noted that for children with autism spectrum disorders early intervention for behavior problems is "paramount". The NIH also reported that behavior analytical approaches have been the most successful in reducing behavior problems, and simultaneously expressed alarm over the increasing usage of drugs to ameliorate such problems. I think it is critical to recognize that the NIH review of treatment options available for children with autism spectrum was based on behavior intervention programs designed, implemented, and adjusted using outcome data, by persons who were highly trained in behavior analytic theory and had a proven record in the implementation and manipulation of current behavioral technologies. To assume that use of behavioral technology, in isolation from the training required to demonstrate mastery of such technology, is adequate presents a serious error in judgment. Behavior technology can have serious consequences for recipients of such technology when used by persons who have 'minimal' or 'no' training what so ever.

I would like for you to consider the current issues being faced by the Norwalk Public School Districts. A woman was hired to work with children on the autism spectrum who was not highly qualified.

Although this particular individual was not truthful about her qualifications, this bill would allow such an individual who has not spent years studying past research and performing behavior analysis under the watchful eye of a Doctoral level Behavior Analyst, to perform all the duties of a highly trained Behavior Analyst, the outcome will be the same. The unqualified person will undoubtedly underperform, the children will suffer, precious time will be lost and the parents will sue.

The education and treatment of children and adolescents on the autism spectrum is a serious enterprise; but one that has a wealth of empirically validated teaching and treatment approaches. Administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents can, for example, read a handful of studies on using a DRO to reduce rates of aberrant behavior. Reading research doesn't mean an untrained person will know what to do when the student does not behave as the subjects in the study behaved. It is at this point that one's lack of mastery of the subject matter and technology can result in unwanted outcomes; outcomes that can result in harm to the student and staff both physically and psychologically.

I have spent four years consulting to various school districts throughout New Haven and Fairfield Counties. My services were most often requested to deal with those students that the schools had given up on. These were the students who didn't respond to what the educators thought was behavior analysis. I can't tell you how many times, a school psychologist, teacher or administrator has explained a behavior analytic term to me incorrectly. For example, the use of the term "negative reinforcement," its correct definition is the process by which one increases a desired behavior by removing an aversive item or event. The

example I always hear is that negative reinforcement means yelling at the student until they stop that inappropriate behavior or magically starts behaving. This one example is just the tip of the iceberg.

I would like for you to consider that autism spectrum disorder is an extremely complex disorder that Board Certified Behavior Analysts have spent years studying with respect to behavior analysis' affect on it. To task someone with gathering all that information on his or her own, is wholly irresponsible and detrimental to the field of behavior analysis.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I hope it affords you a better understanding of our work, and the serious ramifications of Bill 1105.

Sincerely,

Erin B. Carey - Hearn, M.A., BCBA  
Behavior Analyst  
ACES Center for Autism Spectrum and Developmental  
Disabilities  
26 Old Post Road  
Northford, CT 06472  
203-484-9501